

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 91 (2013) 539 – 544

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

PSU-USM International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences

Diabetic Healthcare Awareness in Malaysia: The Role of Poster as a Communication Medium

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Abstract

Poster has been a medium of communication in public healthcare since World War I and II. During then, Europe, America and Soviet used poster to channel the minds of their society towards one common insight. From this iconic scenario, the term poster propaganda has emerged. To date, posters have been used extensively in many areas especially healthcare education. Poster in healthcare as particular is the tool and medium for health-behaviour change to attain healthcare awareness. In Malaysia, numerous diabetic campaigns on diabetic healthcare awareness with the aid of posters have been held throughout the country. The use of poster by the government is meant to trigger the public on the hazardous alarm of diabetes. However, despite various efforts from government to the public through diabetes posters, Malaysian diabetes statistic still increases drastically from 1.6 million in 2011 to 2.6 million in 2012. The huge increase in statistic invites an enquiry on the role of diabetic posters as a communication medium on diabetic healthcare awareness. This study explores public opinions through observation and interview in three different regions to describe and interpret public opinion on current diabetic posters. Beneficial entries from this study would go to the Ministry of Health Malaysia, Malaysian Diabetic Society and the public towards a better understanding on the role of diabetic poster as a communication medium in diabetic healthcare awareness.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Keywords: Poster; diabetic healthcare awareness; visual communication.

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1. Introduction

Diabetes is grouped under Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) which is non-infectious (Malaysian Government National Strategic Planning, 2011; World Health Organization, 2011) [1]. The disease is a deadly silent killer, and it is costly. It involves high expenses for its medication. Diabetes does not give any signs of its existence (Malaysian Diabetic Association, 2009) [2]. Most of the causes are from unhealthy diet, lack of exercise and lack of awareness in healthcare (World Health Organization, 2006) [3].

Lacking of healthcare awareness could lead to diabetes and other complications. Mafauzy (2005) found out that the primary diabetic patients who prefer to attend private clinics for diabetes medication do not experience proper diabetic care knowledge and procedures [4]. “Knowledge on the status of diabetes care and prevalence of diabetic complications in this country is important to evaluate and to provide a baseline to improve the quality of diabetes management” (Mafauzy, 2005: 212) [5]. This coincides with Matthaei, Munro and Zinman (2007) articulated that “people with type two diabetes mellitus are not always receiving the advice and guidance they need to manage their diabetes” (32) [6]. The importance of awareness on diabetes is crucial as one would not notice if he has got diabetes type 2. Diabetes type 2 happens when the body does not produce enough insulin which leads to excess glucose in the blood. At this early stage, many of us are not aware of it as we feel we are healthy despite having tendency of feeling restless and developing into obesity. If preventive measures are not taken from now under various disciplines, the increment of diabetic patients in the near future could incur higher healthcare expenditure for the country. In a visual art perspective, diabetes healthcare awareness is seen important through posters as its communication medium.

2. This paper discusses about diabetes healthcare awareness through posters. Poster has been the best medium of knowledge transfer. To date, poster is still a relevant method of communication despite other advancements in technology. Due to its’ persuasive and informative criteria, it gained success to create awareness among the public as well as to educate and mobilize the people. It has long been classified as a ‘weapon of persuasion and change’.

2.1. *Poster as Weapon of Persuasion and Change*

During World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945), posters were weapons in the European countries as an agent of persuasion to persuade the citizens to believe some issues or to support the governments’ initiatives. “The poster was the principal instrument of persuasion and expressed, in the most direct terms, the preoccupations of a nation’s leaders and the political, military and moral imperatives which drove them, from simple appeals to patriotism to anti-Semitism of Nazi ideology” (Cross, 2009; 52) [7].

Since the massive use of posters by the governments as effective communication tool, posters were then called propaganda. Propaganda means the spread of ideas and opinions which may be true or false but aimed to get people to believe them (Aylett, 1988). “Propaganda may be defined as a concentrated series of messages aimed at altering the opinions or behavior of a large group of people” (Ingilis, 2008; 262) [8].

During the early of World War, men were called to serve as army through volumes of persuasive posters while women were told to stay at home. At the time, women were pictured as weak and feminine, they were encouraged to take care of the children and prepare food for the army. However, later through the World War, there was less manpower. Since then, the role of women had changed. The change was enforced through recruitment posters. Women were called to join the forces through various series of recruitment posters. Since then, the feminine role of women has been ignored. The impact of recruitment posters’ images and wordings had successfully influenced women to be daring, masculine, strong, and capable, inline with the rest of the men. One

of the most popular recruitment posters was portrayed by J. Howard Miller's Rosie the Riveter (Stock-Allen, 2011) [9].



Figure 1. Persuasive women recruitment poster “Rosie the Riveter”
(Source: Stock-Allen, 2011)

2.2. Posters Related to Healthcare During World War

The strength of poster during the World War, had contributed so much in deliberating healthcare awareness to the soldiers. The government announced preventive measures to stay away from prostitutes or so called ‘loose-women’ to avoid getting infected with diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea. For the sake of the country, the soldiers were told to stay healthy through posters.



Figure 2. Syphilis & Gonorrhea
(Source: judibee.hubpages.com, 2012)

During the World War, general health of the public is inseparable as the public is exposed to hazards. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the government to educate healthcare towards the public. When the war exploded in Europe in 1917, their governments have stepped forward to keep its people healthy with health campaigns also with the use of posters. The use of posters evolved from French Belle Epoque poster craze during 1890's, then it wide-spread to Europe with catchy art and forceful messages as a health instrument (Barett, 2010) [10].

The poster in Figure 3 shows how disease could be spread through sneezes and coughs by the British Ministry of Health. The poster had been used during World War 2 in between 1941 – 1944.



Figure 3. One of the healthcare posters during World War 2 (1941-1944)
(Source: www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/31965)

Effective visual images in posters have the power to engage and elicit behaviour changes that improve health. This is a key reason why public health posters have become a fundamental way for governments to disseminate messages about health. Posters are cheap to produce and majority being seen by many people (Barrett, 2010) [11]. Until today, the use of posters are still valid, vital and being considered as a fundamental communication tool to boost awareness among the public (Bu and Fee, 2010) [12].

2.3. Poster as Tool of Communication in Diabetes Healthcare Awareness

Based on the previous experience of poster propaganda in Europe, it is not possible that the success of the past to be brought forward in this current situation in healthcare awareness. Diabetes healthcare posters in Malaysia are normally posed in hospitals, healthcare centers and clinics. The role of diabetes healthcare awareness poster is to transfer the knowledge to the audience. However, the role of it is questionable when the diabetes statistic in Malaysia for the year 2012 has increased to 2.6 million as compared to 1.6 million in year 2011. Despite efforts by government to hold diabetes campaigns and other scientific activities, the diabetic statistic still shoots up tremendously each year. Hence, the role of diabetic healthcare awareness posters that has been used extensively in this country needs to be dealt in a different platform. The different platform is not just incurring scientific programs to spread the words of wellness, but also to articulate the artistic value and artistic point of view which significantly involves ‘visual communication’ aspects for the characteristics of posters as such that had been done in the past. Without any constant preventive measures, the society would be affected into mortality and morbidity.

In Malaysian healthcare, poster becomes one of the most important communication tools from the government to the public. There have been numerous diabetic campaigns throughout the country with the aid of posters. Poster in healthcare as particular is the tool and medium for health education and health-behaviour change to attain healthcare awareness. The use of diabetic poster by the government is meant to trigger the public on the

hazardous alarm of diabetes. The purpose of diabetes poster is also meant “to inform the population of the risk factors and to diagnose and prevent the disease at an early stage” (Novo Nordisk, 2006:33) [13].

A study by Ward and Hawthorne (1994) revealed that patients in a hospital notice the availability of the posters and they read them. The longer they wait for the appointment, the more they are likely to read the posters. Their study also showed that there was a need for more information by the patients. The study also showed that “posters are a suitable medium for health promotion, it would be interesting to see if their messages are effective in the process of changing patients’ behavior and lifestyles” (Ward and Hawthorne, 1994; 585) [14].

2.4. Method

In 1980, a similar research found that informative and readability was the general characteristics chosen for health posters. From those articles, there is no fixed method to evaluate the effectiveness of health promotion posters. However, there are approaches in other previous studies that have proven to be practical and useful. It is the evidence of awareness, increment of knowledge and change of attitude in the people that could prove a poster to be effective (Bu and Fee, 2010) [ibid]. This study adapts Ward and Hawthorne (1994) to find out whether people notice the posters and whether they read them.

Therefore, model of Communication Theory by Shannon and Weaver (1949) has been adapted in this study. This communication theory portrays the sequence of communication process. In this process, poster is used as a medium of persuasion as it controls the receiver’s perception (Adzrool Idzwan, Kamarudzman and Mustaffa Halabi, (2010) [15].

Sequence of interviews would be done among public in three socio economic regions namely urban, suburban and rural.

2.5. Conclusion

Poster is often said as a ‘public’ piece of paper which contains text and graphic image. The intention of a poster is to deliver message. The process of delivering message involves communication. Communication through poster is when the receivers receive the message and turns it into a new knowledge. In this instance, constructivism theory appears and portrays that ‘poster communication is constructivism’ in educating the public on diabetic healthcare awareness.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Professor Mustaffa Halabi Hj. Azahari and Dr. Adzrool Idzwan Ismail for their kind support and guidance in this study.

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